



RHS It's Your Neighbourhood Assessors' Guidance Notes

The Core Pillars

Community Participation (40%)
Environmental Responsibility (30%)
Gardening Achievement (30%)

Introduction

All of the suggestions that follow are examples of things that may be present in an 'It's Your Neighbourhood' entry – they are not a list of things to be done or to be achieved!

When an 'It's Your Neighbourhood' group forms and begins work they should set their own goals which should be suited to their local needs - what follows are ideas to help illustrate activities relevant to each pillar, not rules to be followed nor to-do lists to be ticked off.

Assessors benchmarking the achievements of the group should have a completely open mind about what the aims and goals of the group are and how these are being met. They should consider whether these are realistic and manageable; whether the work carried out and on display is relevant to the core pillars. The assessor should not be only looking for examples from the suggestions below but should have a positive and receptive outlook and consider where the group started, the challenges that they face and how far they have come.

The assessor should aim to provide positive and helpful guidance on how to best achieve their goals. In the case of It's Your Neighbourhood entries the assessor must take into consideration the context in which the group is working when assessing and should not be comparing one entry to another. The assessor is benchmarking the achievements of the entry in the areas of the core pillars by considering how much the entry has achieved already and how much more they could achieve and deciding the score accordingly.

The assessor is there as a mentor and friend – not a judge – and should be focused on ensuring their visits encourage groups to continue their good works and give them constructive feedback to help them on their way.

Community Participation

40% – 40 out of 100 total marks

Community participation is about working together for the benefit of the local area and it may or may not involve participants in the physical work; community participation can also include fundraising, moral support, provision of facilities and resources, publicising activities and many other activities. There are no size limits – a group is more than one! Larger groups may sub-divide into smaller groups with particular objectives (i.e. involving children/young people; developing community gardening activities; providing refreshments, making leaflets/posters etc). A group may not have large numbers of active workers or "official" members but they may be engaging others in their various projects and activities on a casual, drop-in/drop-out basis. In other words groups will come in many sizes and have as many different structures; the key is that even if there are only one or two key players driving the project they are already engaging with other members of the community in some way or seeking ways in which to do so in the future.

Within this section there may be found examples of community participation such as:

Being inclusive –the group is a part of the community and has an openness which enables any other member of the community to support, contribute to or have say in their work if they wish. An entry or group may have a specific “membership” (i.e. a young person’s group) and still be inclusive.

Representation – the people involved with the entry’s projects and activities are representative of the diversity of the people in the locality.

Local ownership and direction – the decisions about what needs doing and how things are undertaken are taken by the community and the group at local level.

Making a difference to local people – it is clear that what is happening has the support of local people and is improving aspects of daily life in that area.

Partnership working – the group may also be working with any one or more of the following: Area Panels, Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Watch groups, Wildlife ‘Watch’ groups, police/community support officers, residents’ associations, etc. as relevant.

Getting support – the group has succeeded in or is working towards getting the support of their local council or councillor and businesses in the community, finding sponsors or sponsorship-in-kind, securing grants or other funding, etc.

Evidence of planning for the future – the group has shown they are thinking about and planning for ways to maintain the work they have already done and/or make even more improvements in the future.

Retaining local control – local people are involved with the planning and decision-making

Communities in areas where there are issues with anti-social behaviour or similar problems may develop partnerships with local police and community support officers.

In communities where the issues may relate to the lack of routine interaction between people, they should consider how they can use It’s Your Neighbourhood to create opportunities for interaction.

It does not matter what type of community participation takes place – only that it is positive and involves local people in the process of improving their area.

Environmental Responsibility

30% – 30 out of 100 total marks

Environmental responsibility is about care for your local area and where possible minimising adverse impacts on the environment. It may encompass aspects such as cleanliness of the streets and pavements, or of reducing use of natural resources. It is about the direct effects that people working at local level can achieve, and not about factors such as waste collection by the local authority.

Within this section there may be found examples of environmental responsibility such as:

Efforts to promote responsible dog-ownership and reduce dog-fouling.

Efforts to reduce littering, graffiti, fly-posting and fly-tipping and efforts to clean up areas degraded by such activities.

Promotion of: use of peat-free compost, composting of green waste in community composting schemes, separation of waste in the local cemetery, minimising water wastage in plant containers.

Development of community green spaces, including the increased participation and use of the spaces and developing the skills and involvement of users.

Conservation activities, which may include promotion of wildlife through installation of bird boxes, bat boxes, planting of wildlife friendly plants where relevant/applicable.

Encouragement of a sense of local heritage through education and heritage-related projects and activities (i.e. tree trails, history leaflets, signage/interpretation boards etc.).

Gardening Achievement

30% – 30 out of 100 total marks

What is within this section will be completely dependent on the nature of the local area and should always be relevant and appropriate to the needs of that area and to the wishes of the community. At all stages there should be consideration given to good gardening practices that suit local needs. These activities should enhance the locality for the community and should be within their ability to develop and manage over the medium to long term.

Within this section there may be found examples of good gardening practices such as:

Good plant choices for the climate or soil, or which suit the heritage and local environment.

Appropriate quality of maintenance – good pruning, mulching, lack of weeds.

Creativity – where the planting used for the area shows originality and local flavour.

Development of community gardening activities – developing areas in partnership with village halls, church groups, allotment societies etc. and/or undertaking group planting events for window boxes, hanging baskets, bulbs or wildflower areas.

Taking on the maintenance of neglected areas such as barren verges or waste ground

Guidance on Marking

Assessment decisions must be realistic and should take account of how much has been achieved, how much more could be achieved and the challenges which have been faced. When assessing a mark, assessors should always bear in mind the context in which the entry is working.

There is a total number of marks allocated to each section and the sections correspond to the 3 core pillars of It's Your Neighbourhood. There are no sub-sections with allocated scores; the assessor evaluates the section as a whole.

The items listed within each section are simply suggestions of things that groups could/should be doing for that core pillar; they do not have to be doing all or even most of them to earn a top mark for the section. The assessor needs to gauge how much has already been done against how much could be done, by the group and under the conditions present.

- Assess the number of points you wish to allocate by considering the section as a whole and the core pillar it represents
- It may also be helpful to consider if, in relation to the core pillar, they seem to be just starting out or if they have achieved something truly outstanding, or are they making some improvements, developing on existing achievements or thriving in that area?

Levels of achievement – overall marks:

Level	Description	Points
Level 1	Establishing	0-35
Level 2	Improving	36-52
Level 3	Advancing	53-68
Level 4	Thriving	69-85
Level 5	Outstanding	86-100

A matrix with the score breakdown by section and corresponding level of achievement is attached but please see here below for some additional guidance about marking and levels of achievement.

Levels of achievement

A note about Levels 1 & 2 (Establishing and Improving)

Does offering someone who has achieved very little a certificate of achievement “devalue” the other higher level certificates? No. What assessors need to recall is that because It’s Your Neighbourhood is not competitive and because the projects are all volunteer-led, we want to encourage even those who are truly just starting out by recognising the first steps they have taken. It is felt that taking the “no award” option which exists in Britain in Bloom would be demoralising and counter to the ethos of the campaign. In addition, assessors must remember that in “marking” an IYN project they are encouraged to use their judgement and if the assessor feels that someone really has not done enough to earn a certificate they should let their region/nation know and this can then be appropriately managed. Furthermore, the RHS will be recommending that regions/nations ask groups a few simple questions on their registration form to try to ascertain in advance if the group is ready for assessment or if they should continue to develop for another year. Finally, it is believed that very, very few groups are likely to be true level one.

Distribution of marks

Community Participation (40%)

Environmental Responsibility (30%)

Gardening Achievement (30%)

Given this distribution of marks could a group earn a certificate without doing anything related to horticulture or the environment? Actually, although technically this may be true when looking at the value of each section in isolation, if you look at the definition of an It’s Your Neighbourhood group this is not possible. It has been stated that a group must be:

- A group
- Hands on
- Involved in community gardening
- Representative of the community and/or getting input from the community
- Benefiting the community
- Volunteer-led
- Sustainable over time
- Owned by the community and with the community responsible for the work

It is important that assessors do bear this in mind when they are making their judgements about the projects they visit. So, although it is true that a group that is just starting out may not yet have actually done very much work from an environmental or horticultural point of view, they must have given evidence that their project does involve these elements and that they will implement them in the future. Again assessors are being asked to use their judgement – we want to encourage new groups to continue by recognising their first steps/achievements and judges will need to use the comments area to give groups clear direction if they are concerned that projects may not have enough of environmental and/or gardening elements.

The matrix overleaf is a rough guide to what assessors might expect to see by way of achievement in each area for the given level. This is not comprehensive and is truly just a rough guide to give assessors an idea of how the achievement levels work in each core pillar area.

Level	Community Participation	Environmental Responsibility	Gardening Achievement
Establishing (0-35)	Formed a group & started talking to / getting input from community	Are considering environmental implications of project & how they can benefit environment	Project is focused on gardening & has potential to be a of high standard
Improving (36-52)	Community is informed about the group; volunteers are coming forward; approaches to appropriate parties for support are being planned	Environmental initiatives are being incorporated into planning of project (i.e. harvesting rain water, controlling litter & graffiti, minimising use of chemicals)	Group is showing due consideration for good horticultural practice; starting to do some gardening work (e.g. clearing the site(s) or areas, preparing the soil)
Advancing (53-68)	Group has some support in place; community members are starting to experience the benefits of the project; group is continuing to evolve and develop a structure; new members/volunteers are getting involved	Environmental initiatives are being implemented appropriately; group is starting to educate the community about them; improvements in environmental quality are noticeable	Gardening is in progress and although the plants or projects may not be fully mature there is clear evidence of good planning and horticultural practice as well as creativity
Thriving (69-85)	Group & project are well known in the community; appropriate partnerships/support are in place; participation/volunteer numbers continue to grow; increased sense of community and civic pride are evident	Initiatives are starting to benefit the environment (i.e. litter has been reduced or eliminated, wildlife is being encouraged, green waste is being recycled); it is evident community is well informed on these initiatives; very good environmental quality throughout the community activity and/or project site	The group is continuing to evolve the gardening in a manner appropriate to the site/area and which can be sustained over time; plants are well chosen and well cared for; very good horticultural practices are evident
Outstanding (86-100)	Group is established and has support in place to sustain project into the future; could serve as an example for other groups; community is engaging with the project and reaping the rewards	Environmental initiatives are being continuously developed; environmental benefits are measurable; there is on-going education on environmental initiatives; excellent environmental quality throughout site and/or projects and starting to improve outside the core as well	High quality planning and design are obvious; very high standard of horticultural practice throughout; excellent standard of maintenance; gardening activities show originality and creativity